

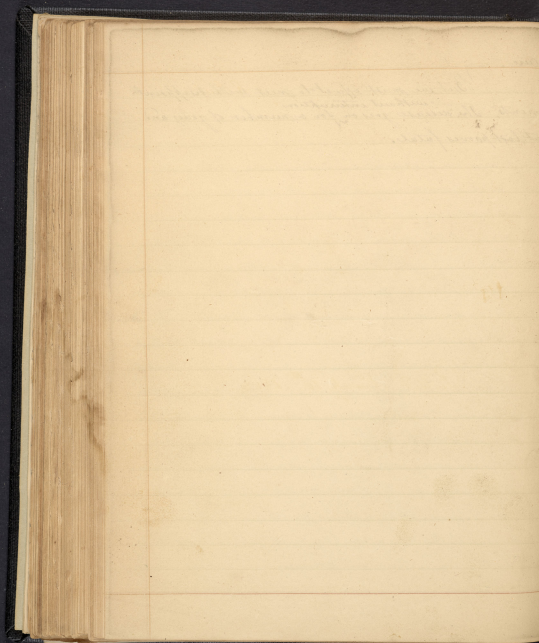
Constipation of the Bowels.

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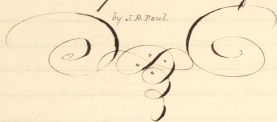
J R Paul

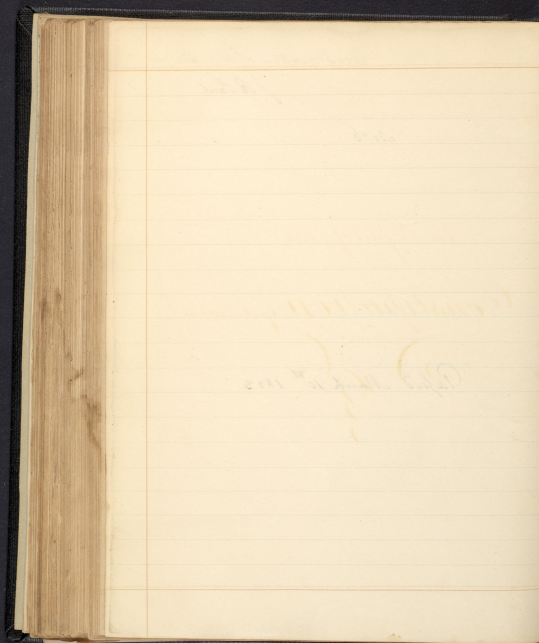
No 26

Filed March 10th 1823



An Essay on
Constipation of the Bowels
by J. R. Paul.





Constipation.

Experience is generally attributed to those who attempt writing on a practical subject but as my opportunities of obtaining it, have as yet been but limited, it will therefore chiefly be the observations of others, that I shall be indebted for the remarks contained in the following Essay.

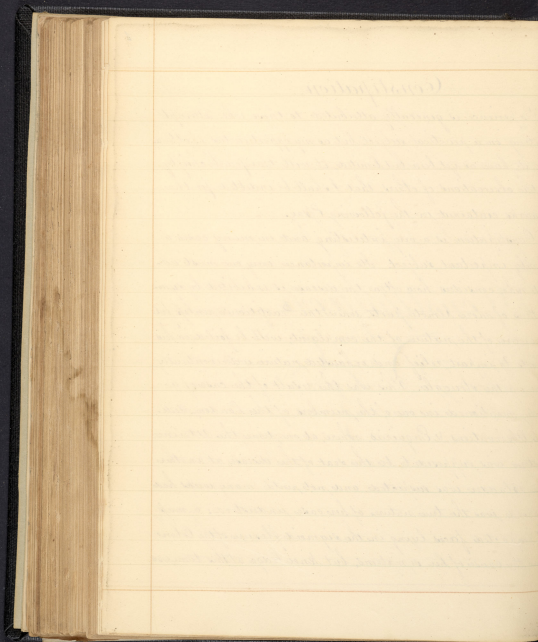
Constipation is a very interesting and in many cases a highly important subject. Its importance every one must admit who considers how often the disease is exhibited by sympathies of more remote parts, where the Practitioner, unless fully aware of the nature of the complaint, will be foiled in his efforts to impart relief and exhausted nature will eventually give in the struggle. This was the result of the case of a Lady, mentioned in one of the numbers of the London Medical Observations & Enquiries, where, at one time, the Uterine System was supposed to be the seat of the disease, at another the Bladder was suspected and, not until many weeks had elapsed was the true nature of her case understood; a mass of impacted feces lying in the sigmoid flexure of the Colon was the cause of her symptoms, but knowledge at this time was

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of no avail - the patient was worn out. The Bowels are often
 is perhaps the primary cause of certain diseases than are
 generally suspected and these frequently occur affections
 of the Head &c. which can only arise from the irritation caused
 by retained feces, spasms, worms, or some other cause located
 in the intestines. Dr. Webster used to relate the case of a
 child who was completely relieved from the most painful
 maniacal symptoms by the free discharge of Ascarides
 from the rectum.

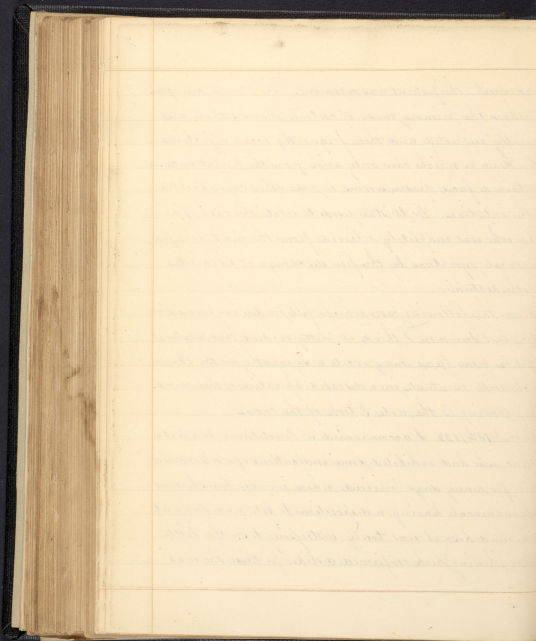
From the following cases which fell under my immediate
 notice last summer, I think it pretty evident, that intestinal
 irritation from feces may excite a sympathy in the Brain
 which will eventually in a diseased operation of the mind.
 The following is the note I took of the case -

August 10th 1822 I accompanied a Practitioner to visit a
 patient who had exhibited some indications of a disordered
 brain for many days previous; when we saw her she was
 quite maniacal having a disposition to bite and snap at
 all around her; it was truly distressing to see this little
 sufferer showing such confirmed dislike for those she was



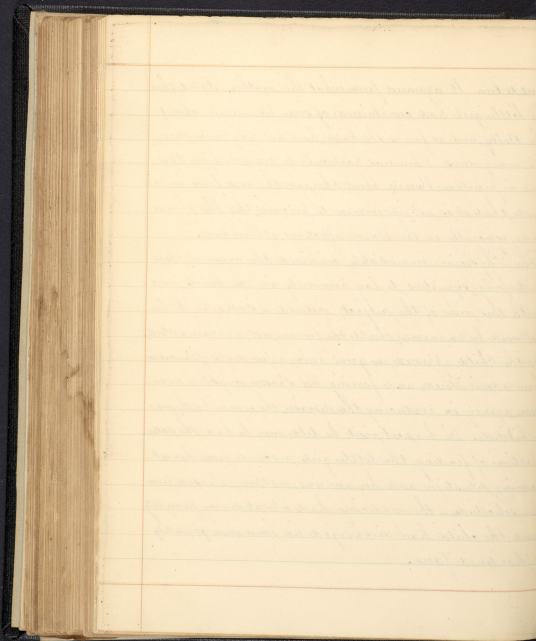
went to love. It appeared from what the mother stated, that the little girl had complained of some uneasiness about the belly, and as far as she knew had not any evacuation for many days. There was particularly remarked in this case a peculiar blueness about the mouth and I am informed that it is not uncommon to perceive this blue appearance especially in the Bowel affections of Children.

The Physician immediately conceived the cause of these distressing symptoms to lay primarily in the bowels, and with this view of the subject, ordered a Cathartic to be followed by an enema, should the former not procure a stool. As the Child appeared in great pain, a few drops of laudanum were administered, and fearing lest opium might have some agency in producing the disease, the warm bath was exhibited. On his next visit he told me, he had the satisfaction of finding the little girl rescued from her alarming situation and her anxious mother released from her solicitude; - the medicine had operated very promptly and the child had discharged an immense quantity of hardened feces.



Recapitulating what I have stated, and judging also from the quantity and consistence of the evacuations, I think, there can be little doubt, but that these, unpleasant symptoms were entirely the result of irritation caused by the retention of hardened feces, the spasm, in the first place, might have had some agency.

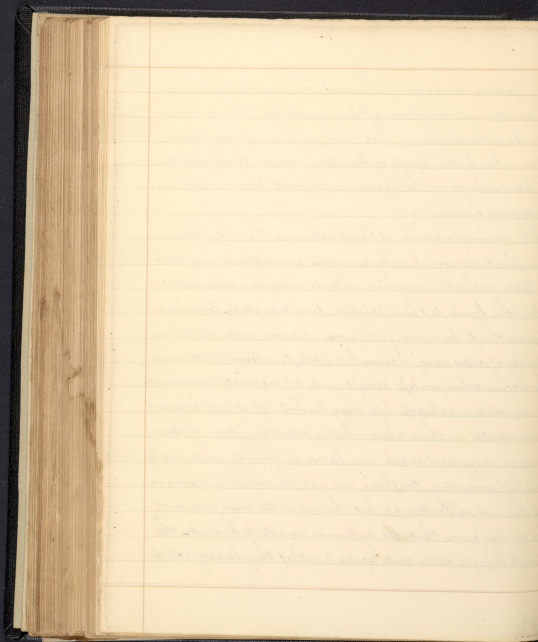
The common opinion of Constipation is, that tho' a very inconvenient disease, it is by no means a dangerous one, that a little cathartic medicine will do away the evil and restore the bowels to their pristine tone & vigour. Experience proves this to be a very fallacious opinion, and tho' the generality of cases may require but little to relieve, still cases do occur where unless prompt and appropriate treatment be pursued, a valuable life may be lost. It is not believed that death in these cases, whether resulting from spasm or from more irritation from feces, is entirely induced by an inflammatory Diathesis, nor yet the result of disorganization as in Peritonitis, but that it is the consequence of so severe pain, that the system is unable to bear it - the bowels being a vital and tender part - if they be subjected



for a length of time to much irritation, must necessarily lead to a fatal result.

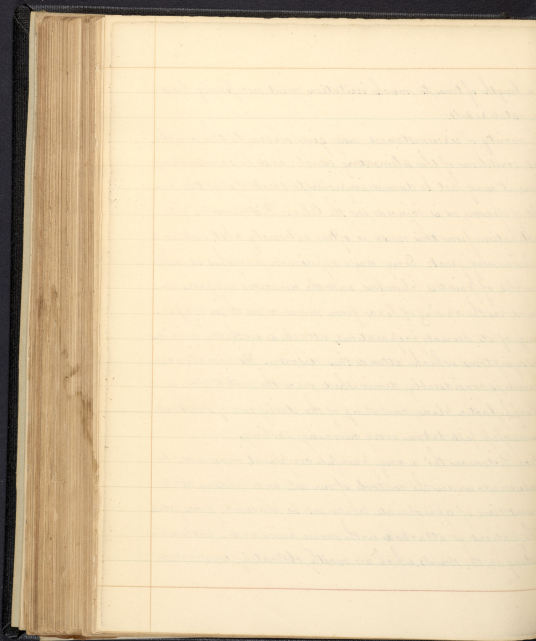
A variety of circumstances may give origin to this unfortunate condition of the alimentary canal, and, in enumerating them, it may not be deemed improper to speak of it as the result of spasm, as is evinced, in the *Colica Pictorum* &c. The constipation from this cause is often extremely obstinate and the pain very great. Every day's experience furnishes us with examples, of painters, plumbers, and the numerous artificers employed in the raising of leads from mines or in the manufacturing of its several preparations, attacked with the dreadful symptoms which attend this disease. Its prevalence however is considerably diminished since the institution of a Prophylactic plan, consisting of the daily use of sweet oil, a wine glass full taken every morning fasting.

Colica Pictorum tho' a very painful complaint, may now be considered, under the control of our art, and seldom at the present time if appropriate treatment be pursued, proves fatal. The patient is attacked with severe pain and spasmodic twisting in the bowels, which are mostly obstinately constipated.

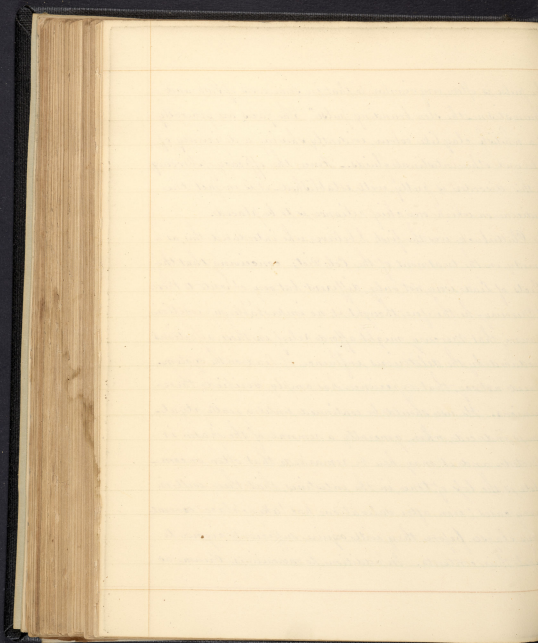


the pulse is often very similar to that in some cases of Put and Rheumatism - the slow bounding pulse" The faces are generally of a whitish clay like colour, evidently shewing a deficiency of Bile and other intestinal fluids. - Hence, the efficacy of Mercury in this disorder is pretty well established - it is in fact the medicine on which our chief reliance is to be placed.

Dr Platteluck, was the first, I believe, who introduced this, as a remedy in the treatment of the Colic Diets; conceiving that the effects of Lead were not only different but very opposite to those of Mercury - he therefore thought it no improbable supposition a priori, that Mercury might afford relief in those affections produced by the deleterious influence of Lead on the system. I need not say, that experience has amply verified these opinions. Its use should be continued, until a gentle ptyalism is induced, when, generally a removal of the spasm is effected - and it may here be remarked, that often, so complete is the loss of tone in the intestines, that there will in many cases (even after salivation has taken place) several days elapse, before they will acquire sufficient rigour to expel their contents. In addition, to mercurials, Opium, as



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being calculated to alleviate pain, and resolve spasms, may be advantageously employed - the combination of Calomel and Opium, to lay by with at night, when the object is to affect the system - this is a very favourite remedy. - The lance may be used, in cases where there is fever attending, or it may operate favourably in relaxing structure. - The warm bath is useful, but where there is much debility, this cannot be resorted to, here we would substitute fomentations by bricks taken out of boiling water and wrapped in flannel - by inducing cutaneous action, they may have a great tendency in relieving spasmodic actions. - In addition to these Cathartics and anodyne enemata are of primary importance in the cure. - A large blister to the abdomen has often a very happy effect. - Slight cases of the disease may yield to Cathartics alone. - and to this indication Salax and Croton Tartar are well adapted. - It is not uncommon for the complaint to terminate in paralysis of the wrists and upper extremities. - Colica Pictonum may be distinguished from Enteritis by the following circumstances. There is not that tenderness and soreness on pressure, as

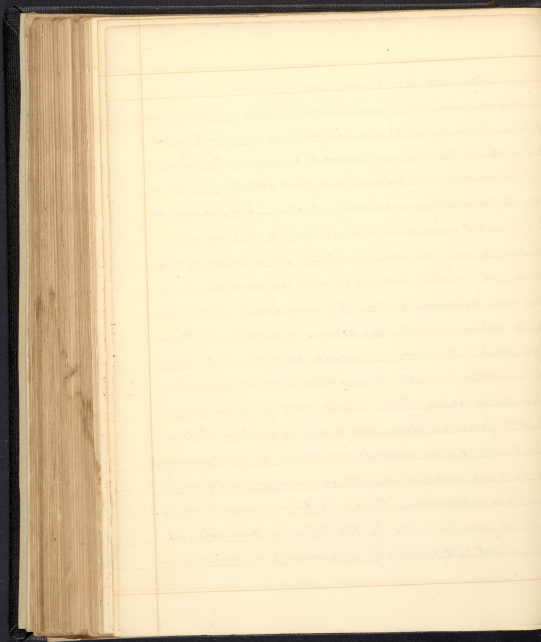


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in Enteritis, on the contrary, proves rather alleviated than increases the pain in Abdomen. The absence of fever in the early stage of the attack; and the peculiar twisting pain & retraction of the navel afford another criterion. The constancy of the pain in Enteritis is a diagnostic symptom.

2, Gout and Rheumatism translated or affecting the Alimentary canal often prove a source of Constipations and in these cases, the symptoms are of a very mixed character being inflammatory and spasmodic requiring the free use of the lancet, Antispasmodics, Cathartics &c. In the case of a Gentleman who was affected in this manner, the condition of the bowels was such, as to induce the Practitioner to resort to the tobacco enema, it was attended by the happiest result; he said, it seemed as if the stricture and pain had been suddenly removed.

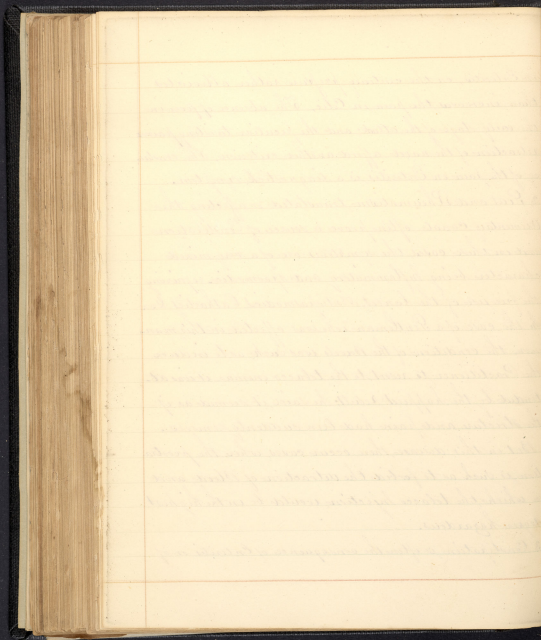
But in this disease, there occur cases, where the prostration is such as to forbid the abstraction of Blood, and in which the tobacco Injection would be in the highest degree hazardous.

3 Constipation is often the consequence of Enteritis or of



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Peritoneal Inflammation. an effusion of Lymph producing adhesions, in different parts of the intestinal tube, and thereby resisting the peristaltic action. We should, therefore, when called to a case of Inflammation of the Bowels, be particularly on our guard, to prevent such an unpleasant result. for when the case has proceeded thus far, it may be regarded in a measure as hopeless - all the purgatives &c which we may employ, procuring little or no effect. It is however, to be much lamented that the disease often comes on, in such an insidious manner, that the fatal blow is struck, before the patient or even the Practitioner, is aware of the danger. - A case of this kind was related to me, where the cause of this obstinate obstruction of the Bowels remained unknown, until disclosed by an examination post mortem - the intestines appeared universally agglutinated, and the medicines which had been administered to excite their action, were found, pretty much in the same order as when taken. I was, lately, present at the examination of the body of a gentleman, where these adhesions were present, and in whom, worn down by continual disease, it appeared like the last effort of expiring

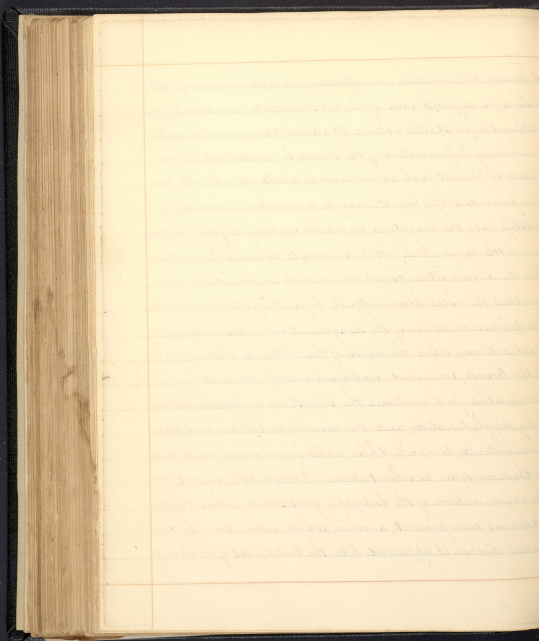


nature. Could this have been the result of Inflammation?

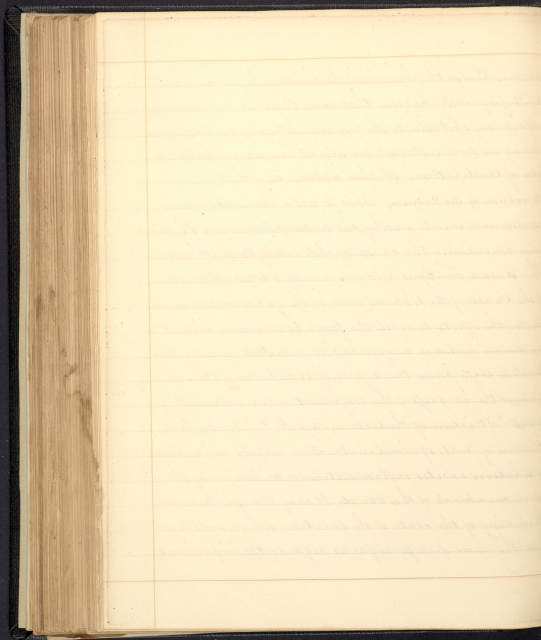
4 It frequently happens that some Organic derangement affords an obstacle to the free evacuation of the faeces, producing in some instances, an almost insurmountable degree of Constipation. Of this nature is, First,

Stricture of the Rectum, This is not a very uncommon disease and is well worthy the contemplation of a Physician when considering the cause of obstinately Constip'd Bowels. This disease sometimes produces, nearly a total obliteration of the Canal of the Rectum, and as the gut decreases in diameter, the efforts to expel the faeces become more violent & the disease assumes a more rapid pace, till finally exhausted with pain, the sufferer yields to his fate.

Such is the progress of the complaint when not arrested by art. "Stricture of the rectum," says Mr Copland, like stricture of parts of similar structure may be produced by whatever excites inflammations or irritation of the inner membrane of the canal. It may therefore be simple thickening of the coats of the intestine, which will produce the same effects as far as regards the impediment



to the passage of feces as if it depended on specific disease." It is said, sometimes to be produced as a secondary symptom of the venereal disease. The first object of the surgeon on discovering the cause, is the enlargement of the constricted part - this is accomplished by means of the rectum bougie or where the stricture is very small, the catheter bougie must be used. It has sometimes been found necessary, to cut with a probe pointed curved bistoury, that part of the stricture contiguous to the sacrum, by which operation the introduction of the bougie is much facilitated. The patient should take mild purgative medicines and continue the use of the Bougie for sometime after the stricture is removed, as it is apt to return. Where there is reason to suspect venereal taint, Mercury should be given in addition to the use of the bougie. - The disease is sometimes of a Cancerous nature and in such cases there is little hope of effecting a cure. Secondly, Hemorrhoidal Excrecences, are often a cause as well as effect of Constipation, the pain on going to stool being very great, the effort is suppressed for many



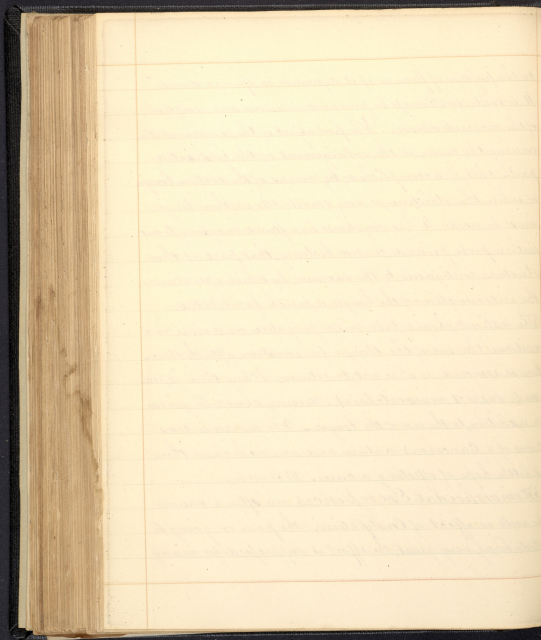
days and thus the desire to evacuate the bowels is done away and the habit of Constipation established. The Inflammation from the excretion of these tumours sometimes produces stricture of the Rectum and its consequences. 3rd

Enlarged Prostate Glands, That is called the third lobe of this gland is subject to enlargement by disease, producing very often a serious impediment to the passage of urine, but the whole gland may become so increased in size as by pressure to prove a source of obstinate Costiveness - in such cases the tumour may be felt by making an examination per anum. 4th

Hemorrhoidal filaments intersecting the Rectum have been known to produce the disease in question, this state of things is also effectually relieved by the use of the Bougie & keeping the bowels in a soluble state. 5th

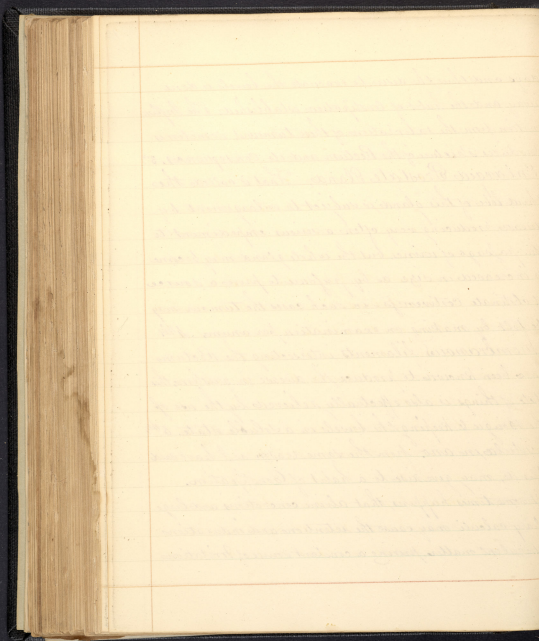
Fistulae, in ano, from the same reason as I have said Piles do, may give rise to a habit of Constipation.

It sometimes happens, that alvine concretions and large biliary calculi may cause the retentions and indurations of faeculent matter, proving a constant source of Irritation,



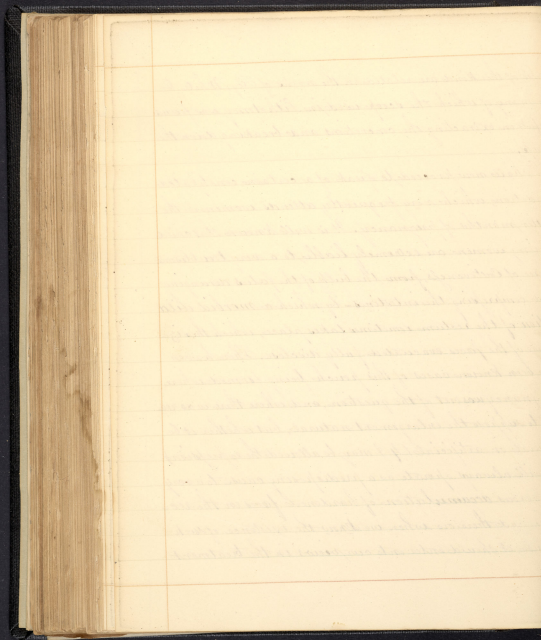
Cases of this kind are related in the works of Hey, White &c. in many of which the scope used, in Lithotomy was found useful in extracting the concretions and breaking down the mass.

I shall now proceed, to speak of a certain constipated condition which very frequently attends women in the latter months of pregnancy. It is well known that child bearing women are extremely liable to a very troublesome degree of Costiveness, from the bulk of the foetus deranging and compressing the intestines - by which a morbid dilatation of the rectum sometimes takes place, which the size of the faeces evacuated fully disclose. There have also been known cases of this pouch being formed where pregnancy was out of the question, and where there was reason to suppose the enlargement natural, but whether it be natural or artificial (if I may be allowed the expression) it will always operate as a predisposing cause to a very dangerous accumulation of hardened faeces in the rectum and therefore when we know the existence of such a cause, it should enter into our views in the treatment



of Colic, at the same time as such a condition has been found to be present, without any obvious predisposing cause, the possibility of the existence of accumulations of this nature ought not to be lost sight of, in any case of real colic attended by a costive habit of body. Mr Bishoprick in the Edinburgh Medical Commentaries relates several interesting cases of this complaint, and strongly insists upon the necessity of close examinations, in those cases of pregnancy where there is reason to suspect any morbid accumulations. We would here infer also the importance of such patients paying strict attention to their bowels, and on no account neglect the use of aperient medicine, to obviate any costiveness that might occur.

It now remains for me to speak of a species of Constipation which makes its appearance under a very obscure form and a Practitioner, unless fully aware of its nature, would be very apt to mistake it for a disease which is diametrically opposite - he might mistake it for a Diarrhoea, and it must be evident to all, that the pursuing of a plan adapted to the cure of the latter would



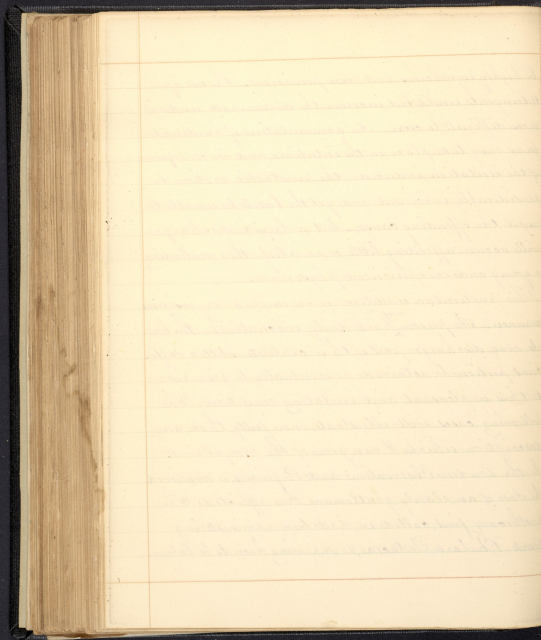
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be highly injudicious and even pernicious. The use of
astringents would but increase the disease and render it
more difficult to cure. An accumulation of hardened
faeces may take place in the intestines, and in consequence
of the irritation induced the peristaltic motions be
considerably increased, and yet the bowels be unable to
expel the offending causes - but a liquid discharge
will occur - affording little or no relief - thus misleading
a young and inexperienced physician.

This particular condition comes on in a very insidious
manner - The person ^{may} have daily evacuations - the bow-
els may discharge part of their contents - still a suffi-
cient portion be retained, as eventually to give rise
to this unpleasant and irritating condition. The
following cases will illustrate more fully than any
description which I can give of the complaint.

In the London Observations and Enquiries, is mentioned
the case of an elderly gentleman thus afflicted. The
Apothecary first called in, had been administering
Bark, Rhubarb, Testacea, &c supposing him to be labour-

be highly

ing under a diarrhoea, But upon another Practitioner being sent for, he observed, that he had frequent motions to stool and these were extremely urgent, some thin excrement was discharged on these occasions but the pain and desire no ways diminished, but returned with redoubled violence. From the violence of the returns the Physician suspected some obstruction in the Rectum. A tenesmus always succeeded the discharges. The Apprentice was directed to introduce his finger into the gut, and the cause of the complaint was at once apparent. he brought away a large quantity of hardened feces and from that moment all unpleasant symptoms vanished. The following Cases which occurred in the practice of Dr. Parrish, shew the importance of close distinctions "S. J. a respectable tho' in rather an obscure situation in life, several weeks after parturition, was attacked with great pain and distress in the abdomen. When I visited her, she began the description of her disease, by saying that she laboured under a "Putrid Lux." She applied this term, from the flatu-



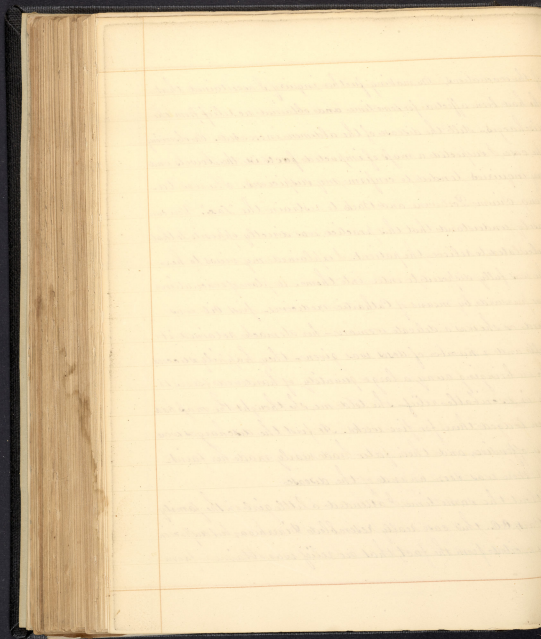
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of the evacuations. On making further inquiry, I ascertained that she had been affected for some time, and obtained no relief from the discharges. Still the disease of the abdomen increased. On observing the case, I suspected a mass of impacted feces in the bowels and my inquiries tended to confirm my suspicions. She was taking Opium, Port wine and Bark to restrain the "Loos". You can easily understand that this practice was directly opposite to that calculated to relieve the patient. I explained my views to her she was fully disposed to enter into them. A plan of evacuation was pursued, by means of Cathartic medicines. First Oil was tried, as she was a delicate woman, - her stomach retained it well, and a number of doses was given - they happily succeeded, in bringing away a large quantity of hardened feces to her indescribable relief. She told me, she thought the mass had been lodged there for five weeks. At first the discharges were very offensive, and their fætor had nearly made her faint - but there was soon an end of the disease.

About the same time, I attended a little girl in the family of Capt. A.C. this case really resembled Diarrhea, but suspicion was excited from the fact, that no relief was obtained from

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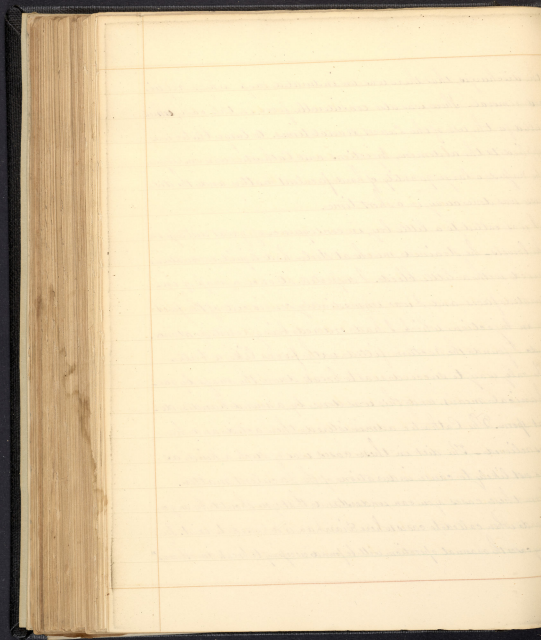
the discharges, that there was an indurated mass which required removal. There was also considerable fever in this case, which called for the use of the lancet several times. A large blister was applied to the abdomen, injections and cathartics were employed, she passed a large quantity of hard feculent matter and the disease was done away in a short time.

I was called to a little boy, in consequence of great distress in the bowels - he strained much at stool - had liquid evacuations mixed with a little blood. I injected at once a mass of indurated faeces - and I was immediately convinced of the fact by an injection which I had ordered being resisted at once. and I found the rectum filled with faeces like a ball. The only way to succeed, was to break down the mass by mechanical means and this was done by a sound handle & sort spoon. The Cathartic administered, then acted and he was relieved - The diet in these cases was of such a kind as was not likely to cause indurations of the feculent matter. From these cases you can understand, that you should be on your guard when called to cases where Diarrhoea is a proof to exist. In many cases the manual operation, will be found necessary to break down the mass."



The indications of cure here, are very obvious - to keep up the peristaltic action by means of Cathartics, by the Ol. Ricini or Panna or by Salap & Cream Tart; or The warm bath may be of service, Injections are to be used if they can be thrown into the bowels - if not the mass should be broken down by mechanical means. In giving Injections, we may occasionally resort with advantage to flexible tubes of some length, as it sometimes happens, that we may desire to carry the injective matter higher up in the Colon, with a little attention it may be passed by the sigmoid flexure, - first introducing the tube as far as it will go in a straight direction and gradually pouring in the fluids, expanding the intestine, it advances - the colon will be reached with little difficulty.

It is of great importance to distinguish between this disease and Typhloea as the treatment differs widely. In the case before us, tho' the pain and uneasiness are very great and the impulse to go to stool is very strong, still the Patient experiences no relief from the evacuations - but not so in Typhloea - here the patient tho' his calls be frequent, generally obtains relief for a time. Or should the person have



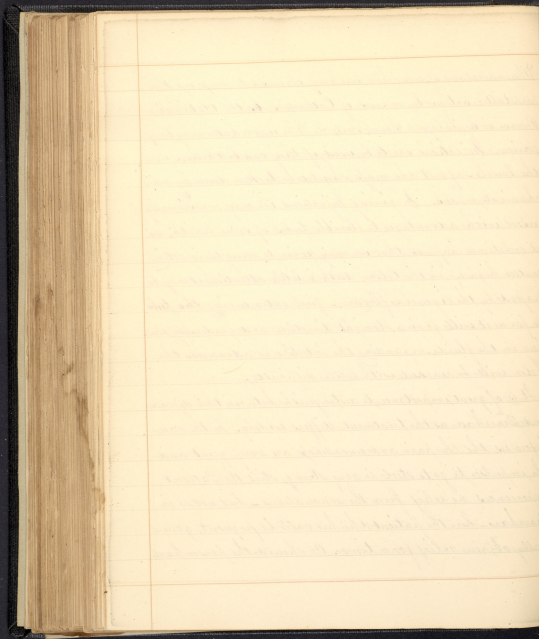
been long costive or subject to Constipation, the inference will be, that it is the consequence of Constipation, but should the description given by the Patient and the preceding circumstances induce the Practitioner still to hesitate, an examination attended with no danger, and performed in most cases with little difficulty will soon clear up the matter.

There is however one disease or condition with which this may be confounded. It is excoriation about the anus as takes place in the latter stages of Dysentery and Diarrhoea. There is great pain and tho' there be copious discharges the tenesmus will cause the patient to remain long at stool. Here also an examination will frequently explain the cause.

In many Persons Constipation seems to be constitutional or the Bowels by some irregularities have acquired a predisposition of habit of Costiveness, and it shall now be my object to endeavour to point out the best method of correcting this habit. ut si.

Cecus, iter monstrare velis. Hor.

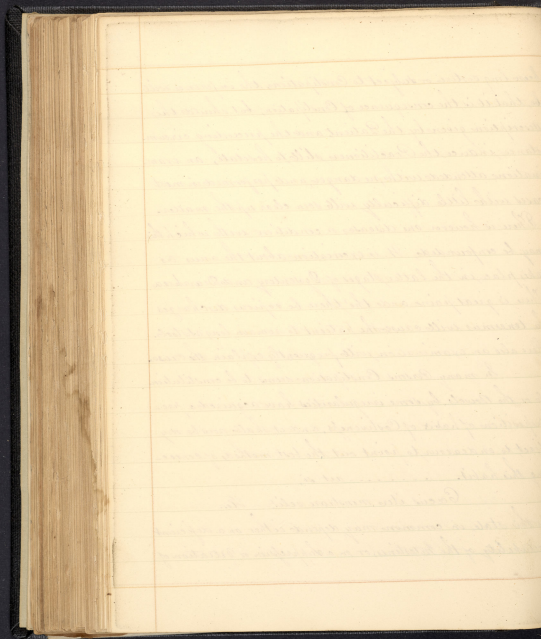
As this state in common may depend either on a deficient Irritability of the Intestines, or on a Suppression or Viti-
ation of



the Bile, by mentioning those causes which may have a tendency to induce these conditions, the means calculated to obviate them, will be better understood.

As excessive mental exertions, severe study and close confinement, are prominent causes in the production of dyspepsia, so can we readily imagine, how the operation of the same, may give origin to a costive habit, to which it bears a strong relation, and it is not at all uncommon to perceive Dyspeptics afflicted with the most obstinate Constipation. Hence sedentary persons are peculiarly liable to the complaint, and hence also we would infer the necessity of those afflicted, in this manner, using moderate exercise. Dr Thomas says that those of a sanguineous and choleric temperament and those subject to Hypochondriac affections, especially when conjoined with inactive habits, are very subject to the disorder.

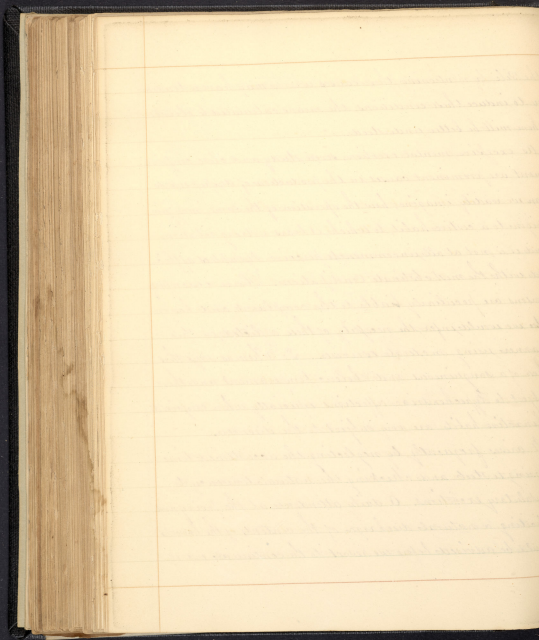
It arises frequently, by neglecting the accustomed time of going to stool, and checking the natural tendency to the salutary exertions. A daily attendance at the privy and soliciting a natural discharge of the contents of the bowels, should be advised before we resort to the continual use of



purgatives, for the use of every cathartic medicine creates a necessity for its repetitions and by this repetition the bowels lose their energy - their delicate nerves become torpid to the stimulus of the food and drink, and the excretions formed from them. Dr Parrish relates the case of an old lady who for 30 years had been accustomed to take a portion of Rhubarb every night and it seemed as if she could not live without it. This habit was never broken until she was in articulo mortis.

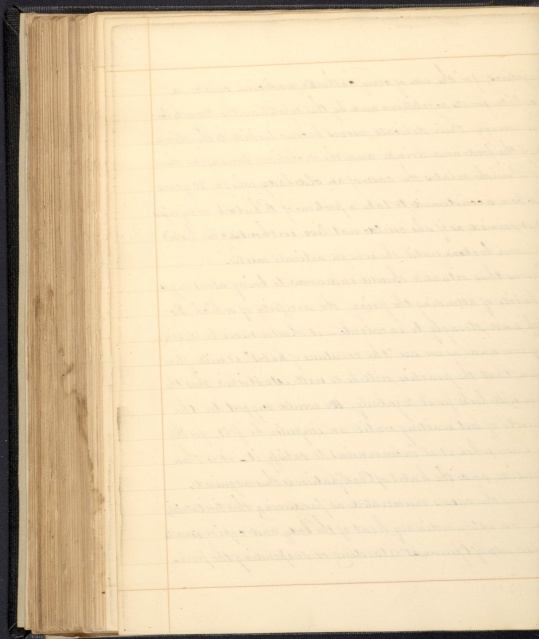
Persons thus situated should endeavour to bring about regular habits of attending the privy, the necessity of which Dr Rush used strongly to inculcate - it should never be deviated from, and as we are "the creatures of habit" it will often happen that the practice will be so well established that the system will look for it regularly. We would suggest too the propriety of not waiting until an impulse be felt, for this may arise when it is inconvenient to satisfy it - it is then laid aside, and the habit of Constipation is thus acquired.

Among the causes enumerated as producing this Irritability, are, an extraordinary heat of the body and copious perspiration - the free use of Opium, as retarding or suspending the peri-



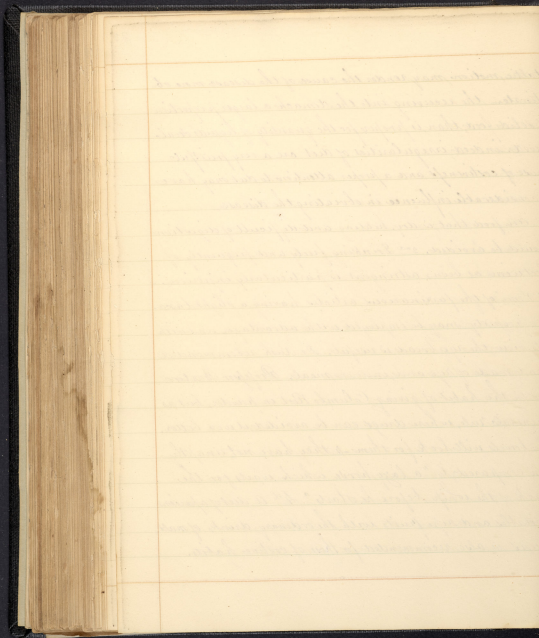
static motion, may render the cause of the disease more obstinate. The receiving into the stomach a larger proportion of solid food, than is proper for the quantity of liquids allowed. indeed, irregularities of diet are a very fruitful cause of costiveness and a proper attention to diet may have a considerable influence in obviating the disease,

- 1st All food that is dry, heating and difficult of digestion should be avoided, 2nd Drinking freely and frequently of Port wine as being astringent is particularly injurious.
- 3rd Some of the farinaceous articles, having a slight laxative property, may be employed with advantage, and with this view, the rye bread is useful. Dr Rush recommended bread made of rye and indian meal. Professor Bartons was in the habit of giving Columbo Root in powder, but as a general rule, where drugs can be avoided, it is better. The bowels will look for them & they have not unaptly been compared to "a lazy horse, which waits for the crack of the whip before he starts" 4th A diet of aperient vegetables and ripe fruits with the ordinary drinks of malt liquors is also recommended for those of costive habits.



In addition to attention to the diet it is often requisite to give medicine, for if the habit be not overcome, it is very apt to produce many highly disagreeable symptoms, such as head ache, vertigo, nausea, foetid breath &c, and it sometimes gives rise to and confirms diseases of a more serious nature. When we suppose these morbid accumulations to originate in deficient irritability, we should resort to the more stimulating Cathartics, to subdue the sluggishness of the Peristaltic motion. It is astonishing to see, in some cases what inordinate quantities of medicine are required before any effect can be produced upon the Bowels. It would appear sometimes, that they were determined to resist the greatest efforts of medical skill. In a case which I saw at the Pennsylvania Hospital, the man was not relieved, until upwards of thirty enemas had been administered and the whole class of Cathartic medicines had been exhausted. In some cases, singular as it would appear, the milder Purgatives have been found to answer where those of a more powerful character had failed.

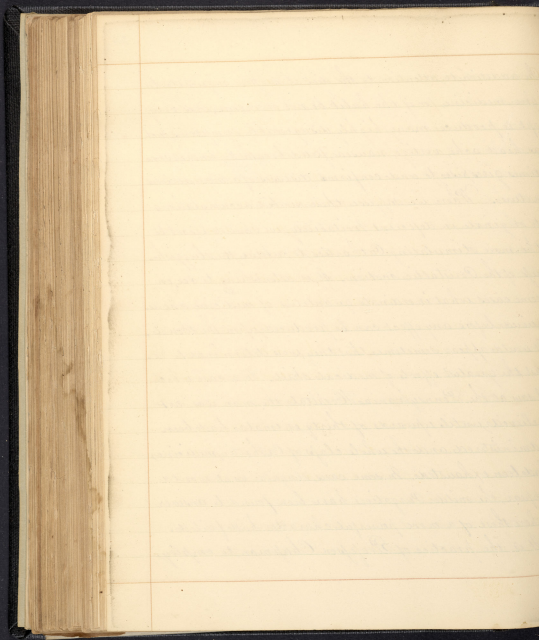
It is the practice of Professor Chapman to employ,



Calomel in large doses two or three times in the course of a few days and then to take every night on going to bed a combination of equal parts of Sac. Sulphuris and Calcined Magnesia. But where deficiency or vitiation of the Bile, is supposed to give origin to the complaint, it is right, says Dr C. under such circumstances, to endeavour to excite the action of the bowels by strong mercurial purges - 5 grains of the Blue Pill every night, to be washed off in the morning by some slight purgative. If these means should fail, it would be proper to induce a gentle Stygalism.

In cases of inveterate Constipation where the usual simple remedies have failed, Carbon, or Charcoal divested of heat has been administered with good success in many instances. I can easily conceive, this to be a very proper remedy, in the complaint, as conjoined with its laxative power, the property which it possesses of correcting the factor which exists in the breath and evacuations would render it, a most valuable article.

The Bile of animals has been proposed as a substitute for the want of it in the human system, by some

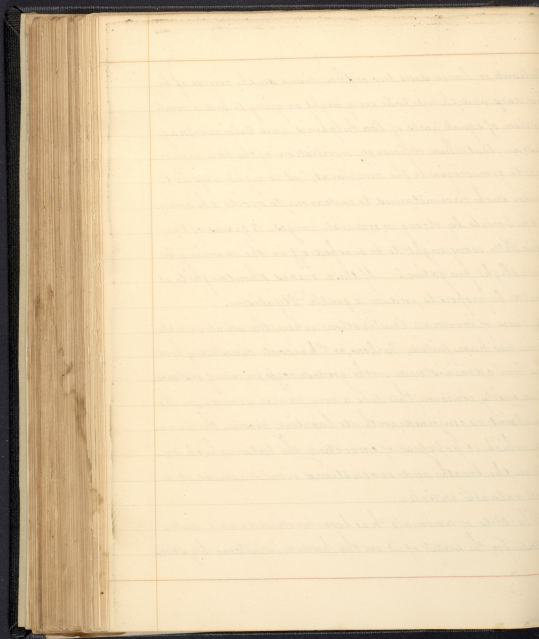


real German writers, but independantly of its acting sometimes as a laxative, I should suppose it to exert but little power.

The affusion of cold water on the extremities and abdomen has been mentioned by authors, as having procured the desired effect when all other means resorted to, had proved abortives. The effects of colds in raising or exciting the actions of internal parts, when applied to the surface, is well known, hence when constipation is the result of torpor of the intestines, a trial of its powers may be advantageous. Dr. Thomas in his work, says, that in several cases of Colica Diuturna the application of cold in the manner above described proved highly efficacious.

Tartarized Antimony exhibited in the form of an enema, has been found to succeed in several cases of obstinately Constipated bowels. It is usual to prescribe a scruple of half a drachm in this manner.

Potasso as enema also, is of great utility in many instances, especially when proceeding from strangled



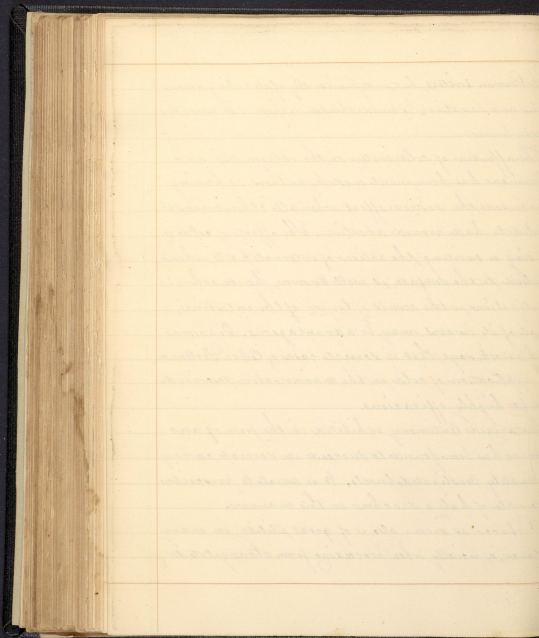
heroina. The fumes of the tobacco have a similar effect.

The Oil of Croton has lately been resorted to for the purpose of evacuating the alimentary canal, and I have no doubt but that its judicious employment will prove a most powerful auxiliary in the treatment of Constipation. I had not long since an opportunity of witnessing its good effects in the case of a gentleman whose bowels had been more or less obstructed for three weeks, A single drop of the medicine made up in a Pill procured most copious discharges & afforded great relief.

These are all the remarks which I have to offer on the subject of Constipation and I respectfully submit them for the perusal of the Doct^r & friend.

John Rodman Pauls

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By

William E. Talbot M.D.

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